

Military Health Initiative

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has affected nearly all areas of the world, but none has been so devastated and none faces continued infection rates so high as Sub-Saharan Africa. At the end of 2001, the World Health Organization and UNAIDS estimated that, of 40 million cases of HIV worldwide, 28.1 million resided in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, of the 5 million newly infected adults and children in 2001, 3.4 million of those were Sub-Saharan Africans. Uniformed services in Africa face specific risks due to the possibility of long deployments, travel into other areas, and conflict situations. The U.S. DoD has been engaged in a component of the larger, White House-directed U.S. government response to AIDS in Africa, which focuses specifically on prevention efforts in the uniformed services of these countries. The program began with a \$10M budget during fiscal years 2001/2002, and made important steps in the establishment of military relationships and the obligation of funds for assistance in each country's specific prevention efforts. In fiscal year 2002, \$14M was obligated as a program line item in the Defense Health Plan for the expansion of the program. To date, military-to-military engagement has taken place in 19 countries, with impressive, culturally specific programs well-established in five.

Here are two examples of these programs:

Nigeria: The U.S. DoD has contracted with two agencies to continue their outstanding work on the ground in Nigerian Armed Forces. Dr. Alash 'le Abimiku of the University of Maryland Institute of Human Virology, heads up a program invited by the Third Armored Division of the Nigerian Army, which will train local laboratory expertise and will achieve the first ever total surveillance for HIV serostatus among a sub-Saharan African military group. Dr. John Chikwem, of Lincoln University, is working with Nigerian military members to create a peer education based "train the trainers" approach for behavioral intervention among a military population.

Angola: In December 2000, the U.S. Department of Defense offered assistance to the Angolan military (FAA) to develop their HIV/AIDS prevention program. The U.S. DoD, through the U.S. Defense Attache in Luanda, has agreed to provide training and resources to support the HIV/AIDS prevention plan being developed by the FAA. Beginning in April 2001, the U.S. DoD provided equipment (audio visual equipment and computer equipment) to support the HIV/AIDS awareness and education efforts. The U.S. DoD will be providing training in the area of infectious disease treatment and laboratory procedures. In addition, the U.S. DoD has contracted with Charles R. Drew University Medical School to develop and implement an HIV/AIDS prevention program in the FAA. Currently the U.S. DoD is considering whether additional parts of the Angolan military HIV/AIDS prevention program will be supported.

The wording of the HR 3338, PL 107-117 discussing the Defense Health Program specifically addresses the HIV challenge in Africa, states in part, "of which \$14,000,000 shall be available for HIV prevention educational activities undertaken in connection with U.S. military training, exercises, and humanitarian assistance activities conducted in African nations."

For more information, visit: <http://www.nhrc.navy.mil/programs/life/>